

SEATTLE  
REP

DUEL

REALITY

Youth Guide

## Welcome to Seattle Rep!

Welcome to Seattle Rep's Youth Guide for *Duel Reality* by the brilliant arts collective, The 7 Fingers!

This astonishing production takes inspiration from one of my all-time favorite plays, *Romeo and Juliet*. Before I joined Seattle Rep, I was a public school teacher, and I loved teaching Shakespeare's timeless tale of love, conflict, and impossible choices. I even had the joy (and challenge!) of playing the nurse, a role that taught me how much humor, heartbreak, and humanity Shakespeare could pack into a single character.

In *Duel Reality*, The 7 Fingers bring that emotional depth to life through breathtaking acrobatics and physical storytelling. Though this isn't a traditional adaptation, the spirit of *Romeo and Juliet* pulses through every movement: the tension between two feuding sides, the connection between individuals across divides, and the risks we take for love and understanding.

Inside this Guide, you'll find background about the show, insights into the creative process, and ways to engage with the themes both in and beyond the theater. Don't miss the Compare and Contrast lesson on the back page—it's a great way to dig deeper into how classical themes live on in contemporary performance.

Enjoy the show!



**Deanna Martinez**  
Education & Community  
Programs Director

## A Simple Summary of *Romeo and Juliet*

A long time ago in the city of Verona, two powerful families—the Montagues and the Capulets—were always fighting. They didn't even remember how the fight started, but they refused to get along.

Romeo was a Montague. Juliet was a Capulet. One night, Romeo snuck into a party at the Capulet house. There, he met Juliet—and it was love at first sight. Even though their families were enemies, Romeo and Juliet secretly got married the next day with help from a kind priest named Friar Laurence.

But things quickly went wrong. Romeo's friend Mercutio got into a fight with Juliet's cousin Tybalt. Romeo tried to stop it, but Tybalt killed Mercutio, and Romeo got so angry that he fought and killed Tybalt. Because of this, Romeo was banished from Verona.

While Romeo was gone, Juliet took a sleeping potion to pretend to be dead to avoid marrying a man she didn't love and later run away with Romeo. Friar Laurence planned to tell Romeo about Juliet's fake death—but the message never arrived.

Romeo thought Juliet was really gone. Heartbroken, he killed himself by ingesting poison. When Juliet woke up and saw Romeo had died, she was so sad that she took her own life, too.

Their families were so shocked and sad by these young deaths that they finally agreed to stop fighting.

## Love *Romeo and Juliet*?

Check out these other adaptations...

### MUSICALS

- ***West Side Story* (premiered 1957)** – One of the most famous *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations, this musical sets the story in 1950s New York City with rival gangs (Jets vs. Sharks) instead of feuding families. Film adaptations were produced in both 1961 and 2021.
- ***& Juliet* (premiered 2019)** – A pop jukebox musical that imagines what would happen if Juliet didn't die at the end of the play. It features songs by pop songwriter Max Martin (like "...Baby One More Time" and "Roar").

### FILM

- ***Romeo + Juliet* (1996)** – A modern version with original language, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes.
- ***Gnomeo & Juliet* (2011)** – Animated garden gnomes reenact the classic story with humor and a happier twist.
- ***Warm Bodies* (2013)** – A zombie love story loosely inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*.
- ***Shakespeare in Love* (1998)** – Imagines Shakespeare falling in love while writing *Romeo and Juliet*.

### MUSIC

- **"Love Story" by Taylor Swift** – A modern take on *Romeo and Juliet* with a happy ending.
- **"Romeo and Juliet" by Dire Straits** – A bittersweet ballad about star-crossed lovers.
- **"Check Yes Juliet" by We the Kings** – A pop-punk anthem about running away together.

### BOOKS

- ***Juliet Immortal* by Stacey Jay** – A fantasy retelling with Juliet fighting for good across centuries.
- ***When You Were Mine* by Rebecca Serle** – A modern version from Romeo's former crush Rosaline's point of view.
- ***Still Star-Crossed* by Melinda Taub** – A sequel imagining Verona after Romeo and Juliet's deaths.

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## Get to Know the Artists: The 7 Fingers

The 7 Fingers is an arts collective from Montreal, Canada, founded in 2002. They create shows that combine cirque, acrobatics, dance, theater, music, and video to tell meaningful stories designed to make the audience think and feel. Their performances highlight trust, strength, and creativity, showing what people can achieve through movement and teamwork. [Learn more at 7fingers.com](https://www.7fingers.com)

# High-Stakes, Circus-Infused Shakespeare

An excerpt from a conversation with writer, director, and choreographer of *Duel Reality* and co-founding artistic director of The 7 Fingers, Shana Carroll



**Seattle Rep:** How do you see Shakespeare's language being elevated by physical movement and circus feats?

**Shana Carroll:** What I love about *Romeo and Juliet* is that the stakes are just so high! Families, lives, and humanity itself are held in the balance by two children who just fancy each other. And circus language has constant, real, undeniable stakes. Using real physical risk to underscore dramatic risk means the audience is feeling those stakes alongside the characters, not just intellectually, but viscerally, too.

**SR:** *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the best-known stories in Western literature, and more than 400 years after its debut, our society is still fascinated with it. Why do you think the play remains intense and engaging when most audience members already know the plot and ending?

**SC:** Love and war. It is the ultimate war story and the ultimate love story! The two most primal forces in our nature. It is in our DNA to “other” another society, because to feel safe we need to feel we belong, but to feel we belong, we need to have a contrasting party that does not belong. So unfortunately, warring tribes in whatever form they take will never fade in relevance. But these two young romantics see past their families (or

tribes or gangs or parties...) and love each other within and through that. Because even more fundamentally than wanting to belong, we want to be seen and loved. It's what stops us from killing each other.

Even though the original story ends in tragedy, it does so as a cautionary tale, which slaps us awake to the real dangers of our most primal, warring urges. We ache to be reminded that love can triumph over war—though in Shakespeare's story, it is through great sacrifice—and we know love is what curbs our worst urges and gives us hope for the future. For a tragedy, this story contains immense messages of hope.

**SR:** What do you hope audiences take away from *Duel Reality*?

**SC:** The themes of community, trust, and connection are key components in most of [The 7 Fingers'] shows, and I believe that circus is the most fitting form to demonstrate humanity's interdependence. For one person to fly in the air, it takes two people to throw them and another two to catch them. At every moment, the performers are putting their lives quite literally in each other's hands—trust is not a luxury, but the key to survival ... I want audiences to walk away from this show feeling a little healed, with a little more faith in our connectivity and in what humans can do when they are willing to throw and catch each other.



**Go Beyond the Show**

Scan here for our full interview and other resources to enhance your experience of *Duel Reality*, including a further reading and media list curated by librarians at Seattle Public Library!

# What Do You Know After the Show?

## WARM UP

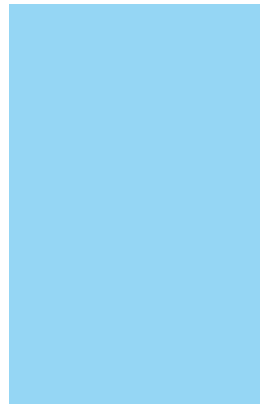
Sort this *Romeo and Juliet* character list into their respective *Duel Reality* color sides, and eliminate any characters not seen in *Duel Reality* in the gray box.

Balthasar	Mercutio
Benvolio	Nurse
Friar Laurence	Paris
Juliet	Peter
Lady Capulet	Prince Escalus
Lady Montague	Romeo
Lord Capulet	Tybalt
Lord Montague	

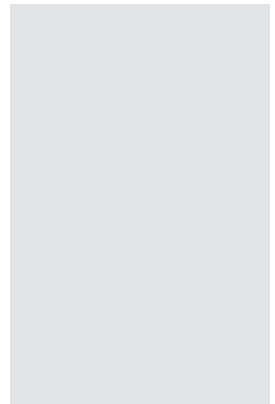
MONTAGUE



CAPULET



NOT IN DUEL REALITY



## LESSON

A **motif** is a recurring element—such as an image, symbol, phrase, sound, or idea—that appears throughout a work of literature, art, or performance. It helps reinforce themes, create mood, or highlight key messages. In theater and literature, a motif:

- is repeated intentionally across scenes or acts
- supports the theme (e.g., love, fate, violence)
- can be visual, verbal, or symbolic

Use the following common motifs to **compare and contrast** *Duel Reality* to other productions or artistic interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Motif	Common Staging	Duel Reality
<b>Light and Darkness</b> Motif: Sun, moon, stars, day/night, candlelight, shadows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Romeo and Juliet often meet at night (e.g., balcony scene bathed in moonlight).</li><li>• Lighting design contrasts bright, warm tones for love scenes and cool, dim light for conflict or death.</li><li>• Projections or lanterns to evoke stars or fate.</li></ul>	
<b>Duality/Mirrors/Symmetry</b> Motif: Pairs, reflections, opposing forces, opposing colors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sets split in two to show Capulets vs. Montagues.</li><li>• Mirrored choreography or blocking to show Romeo and Juliet as emotional mirrors.</li><li>• Costuming to reflect color opposites.</li></ul>	
<b>Fate and Time</b> Motif: Clocks, stars, omens, urgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visible clock on stage or sound of ticking to evoke pressure.</li><li>• Visual use of constellations or horoscopes.</li><li>• Repetitive sound cues (bells, chimes) to mark time running out.</li></ul>	
<b>Youth vs. Age</b> Motif: Impulsivity vs. control, rebellion vs. tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Youth in dynamic, flowing movement; elders more rigid or stately.</li><li>• Stark generational costume divide (modern teens vs. traditional authority figures).</li><li>• Juliet's bedroom as a child's space transformed through love and loss.</li></ul>	
<b>Violence and Passion as Two Sides of One Emotion</b> Motif: Swordplay, blood, touch, fire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Duels choreographed to feel sensual or intimate.</li><li>• Red lighting or fabric represents both blood and desire.</li><li>• Passionate embraces quickly turn to conflict.</li></ul>	
<b>Flowers and Death</b> Motif: Poison, herbs, petals, funerary garlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apothecary scenes using real or stylized plants.</li><li>• Juliet's "death" often surrounded by flower petals or white drapery.</li><li>• Floral motifs in costume or set to signal beauty/frailty.</li></ul>	